



General Assembly

Twenty-second special session

1st plenary meeting
Monday, 27 September 1999, 9 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 9.15 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the Delegation of Namibia

The Temporary President: I declare open the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-22/7)

The Temporary President: I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-22/7, which contains a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 22 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

“A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years.”

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

In accordance with precedents, and as recommended by the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as



the preparatory body for the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, the Credentials Committee of the twenty-second special session should have the same membership as that of the fifty-fourth regular session of the Assembly — namely Austria, Bolivia, China, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall consider the Credentials Committee constituted accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: In this connection, may I invite the attention of the members of the Assembly to a note verbale from the Secretary-General, dated 28 July 1999, in which it was stated that credentials should be issued for all representatives to the special session, in accordance with rule 27 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. I would urge all members to submit the credentials of their representatives to the Secretary-General as soon as possible.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President: The preparatory body recommends that the twenty-second special session should take place under the presidency of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth regular session, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Gurirab President of the General Assembly at its twenty-second special session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: I extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Gurirab took the Chair.

The President: I would like to thank all delegations present for electing me to preside over this twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the

Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Assembly has done me and my country proud.

Statement by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-second special session

The President: This is the last special session of the General Assembly before we usher in the next millennium. The small island States, the international community at large and future generations expect from us all a successful outcome of this timely and important gathering. Let us all work together as a team to make it a reality.

Five years ago leaders from more than a hundred countries met in Barbados at a global conference to address the unique challenges facing small island developing States. That conference was held in recognition of the fact that these nations are among the most ecologically and economically vulnerable. The very survival of some of them is at risk.

In Barbados the world leaders resolved to act in concert with a view to assisting small island States in pursuing sustainable development and economic growth. To that end they adopted a Programme of Action. Since then the small island developing States have made remarkable efforts to tackle their special ecological and economic vulnerabilities and to put in place policies and measures to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. They have become the front-line States in our common struggle against climate change and natural disasters.

During the next two days the urgent task before the Assembly will be to assess those efforts; review constraints that impede progress; examine new problems confronting small island States; and agree on practical steps that need to be taken by the international community so as to implement development strategies. Let us make use of this ideal opportunity to renew and further strengthen global partnership with small island developing States. In this way we can contribute to the realization of the sustainable development objectives of these embattled but courageous countries.

In Barbados the nations concerned pledged to act decisively and consistently to promote sustainable development and cooperation. They have not shied away from their commitments and responsibilities. We admire and respect them for this. Sustainable-development

strategies have been formulated, and their implementation has begun in earnest. Furthermore, important changes for the better have also occurred at the regional level.

Many small island nations have indeed taken courageous initiatives to ratify and implement international legal instruments, such as the conventions on the law of the sea, climate change and biodiversity — to name but a few. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has spearheaded the call for meaningful action in intergovernmental forums, including, in particular, in the United Nations.

Small island States have taken these actions despite the many obstacles they face. Not by their own choosing, they stand in the pathway of natural disasters, as well as of man-made iniquities. Today many small island States are facing the continued deterioration of the marine environment and have to contend with overfishing, marine spills, dumping of ship-borne wastes in their vicinity, transportation of nuclear and other toxic materials through their territorial waters, and watershed destabilization. A number of them have been hit by severe and prolonged droughts — not to speak of devastating hurricanes, tornadoes, storms and floods. The problem of freshwater availability is worsening and is characterized by constant shortages or deteriorating quality. The problems of managing effectively the growing tourism industry have added to the woes of freshwater supply and distribution.

A common hurdle faced by most small island developing nations is the insufficiency of funds relative to the enormity of the challenges at hand. External support has not been forthcoming on the scale promised in Rio and Barbados.

Small island States have highly open economies and are thus adversely affected by the vagaries of the international economy and trade. The most pressing economic issues that should be addressed by this session relate to those that impinge, due to external shocks, on the economic fragility and vulnerability of these States. In a number of small island States the combined effect of the tightening financial situation and the pressing need for political and economic reforms is leading to a de-emphasis on sustainable development programmes and a reversion to placing emphasis on improving short-term economic conditions.

Like the rest of the world, small island developing States share the aspiration for sustainable development and economic prosperity. Their efforts to conserve their natural

and cultural heritage, upon which their future depends, deserve the unqualified support of the international community. The United Nations must be their trusted ally in this crusade. As custodians of large areas of oceans and marine biodiversity, and as the front-line States in our common struggle against climate change and other oceanic aberrations, small island developing States need generous funds and resources to carry out their policies and programmes.

Let us reinvigorate the spirit of unity and solidarity and adhere with a purpose to the global partnership forged in Rio and Barbados. If we all join forces, we can, we must and we will help open up new vistas for development, prosperity and progress for the small island developing States. In this way, we will all be able to usher in together the new millennium and the new dawn.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The President: I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Five years ago in Barbados, it was said of small islands that there was "trouble in paradise". Trouble there was and is, and certainly, many of these islands are among the world's most beautiful places. But a much more accurate description of the situation was the conference slogan: "Small islands, big issues".

The world's small island developing States are indeed front-line zones where, in concentrated form, many of the main problems of environment and development are unfolding. As such, they are among the big tests of the commitments made at the Summit in Rio 1992.

Small island developing States are fragile and vulnerable, both ecologically and economically. First are the built-in constraints. Most small island States have only limited resources, whether land, human or financial. Many lie in the path of hurricanes and cyclones. Second are the environmental problems: climate change, freshwater shortages, inadequate waste management, over-fishing, marine pollution and the threat of accidents involving transports of hazardous wastes. A third set of challenges are those linked to globalization. Tourism is both a blessing and a bane, bringing jobs, but putting strains on water supplies and ecosystems. Trade brings much-needed goods, but liberalization and an end to

special trade preferences will make it harder for some of the products of small islands to compete.

The Barbados Programme of Action was a response to these challenges. It was predicated on an understanding: Small islands would do as much as they could to manage their problems; the international community, as fellow inhabitants of the world island, would provide funding, technology and other assistance in a spirit not only of solidarity, but of enlightened self-interest.

How have both sides delivered on this bargain? Small islands are making genuine progress. Many have formulated national plans of action, created appropriate institutions, enacted legislative reforms and revised their regulatory frameworks. Most are parties to the Convention on the Law of the Sea, as the President said, and to legally binding conventions on climate change and biodiversity. The Alliance of Small Island States has become an important voice, a way for small island States to magnify their political clout.

The international community has supported these moves. The Global Environment Facility has provided millions of dollars in grant money. The United Nations Environment Programme, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other entities have provided technical assistance and policy advice. The United Nations Development Programme has supported the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET), the Internet network for small islands. The private sector has lent its expertise. Non-governmental organizations, as usual, are deeply involved at the grass roots. And yet, island nations hope for even stronger partnerships and even more help. They need the international community to do more — more in terms of investment, more in terms of official development assistance, more in terms of low-cost technologies.

What we do with respect to small island States has implications far beyond their troubled shores. By working with small islands on their problems, we can find solutions for ours. Brighter horizons for small islands can mean brighter horizons for the world in general. I urge the international community to reaffirm its commitment to the world's small island developing nations. Let us find our way to a sustainable world and to the brighter horizons that we would all wish to bequeath as our legacy to our children.

Agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda

Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory body for the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly (A/S-22/2 and Add.1)

The President: I should like to inform members that the report of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as preparatory body for the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States is contained in document A/S-22/2 and Add.1.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

Draft decision II (A/S-22/2)

The President: Members are invited to turn to draft decision II recommended by the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as preparatory body of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly in its report, contained in document A/S-22/2.

Draft decision II is entitled "Organizational arrangements for the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly". May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision II?

Draft decision II was adopted.

The President: On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly on the recommendations of the preparatory body, the following arrangements shall apply to the twenty-second special session:

The Vice-Presidents of the twenty-second special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly.

The Vice-Presidents of the fifty-fourth regular session are the representatives of the following Member States: Algeria, Bolivia, China, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, Grenada, Iceland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lithuania, Monaco, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Seychelles, Tajikistan, Thailand, the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation the representatives of those States Vice-Presidents of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the Chairmen of the Main Committees of the twenty-second special session, the Chairman of the Main Committees of the fifty-fourth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the special session.

The Chairmen of the Main Committees at the fifty-fourth regular session are the following: the Chairman of the First Committee, Mr. Raimundo González of Chile; the Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Mr. Sotirios Zackheos of Cyprus; the Chairman of the Second Committee, Mr. Roble Olhaye of Djibouti; the Chairman of the Third Committee, Mr. Vladimír Galuška of the Czech Republic; the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, Ms. Penny Wensley of Australia; and the Chairman of the Sixth Committee, Mr. Phakiso Mochochoko of Lesotho.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation these Chairmen of the Main Committees at the twenty-second special session.

It was so decided.

The President: In adopting the recommendations of the preparatory body, the Assembly has established an ad hoc committee of the whole, which will be designated as Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-second Special Session.

In accordance with the recommendations of the preparatory body just adopted by the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-second special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, Mr. John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda has been nominated as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly at its twenty-second special session to elect him Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Mr. John Ashe on behalf of the General Assembly, and on my own behalf, and wish him well in the important and onerous responsibilities he has just assumed.

The General Committee of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly has now been fully constituted.

We turn now to matters concerning the participation of speakers other than Member States in the work of the special session.

On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly, observers may make statements in the debate in the plenary.

States members of the specialized agencies of the United Nations that are not Members of the United Nations, namely, the Cook Islands, the Holy See, Niue, Switzerland and Tuvalu, may participate in the work of the twenty-second special session in the capacity of observers.

Associate members of the regional economic commissions, namely, American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong China, Macau, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Niue, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands may participate in the special session, in the same capacity as observer as held for their participation in the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

In addition, Wallis and Fatuna and Tokelau may participate in the special session in the capacity of observers.

On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly, the President may invite a limited number of intergovernmental organizations not covered under paragraph 11 of the decision just adopted to make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Given availability of time, a limited number of non-governmental organizations designated by their constituencies may make statements in the debate in the plenary, subject to the approval of the President of the General Assembly. Accordingly, I shall inform the Assembly on this matter at a later stage.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees that the Caribbean Conservation Association, the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre and the Pan African Movement may make statements in the debate in the plenary?

It was so decided.

The President: Representatives of those three non-governmental organizations will be added to the end of the list of speakers. Representatives of non-governmental organizations that cannot be accommodated in the plenary and those designated by their constituencies may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Representatives of United Nations programmes and others in the United Nations system may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

In accordance with the decision just adopted by the General Assembly, there will be six plenary meetings over the two-day period, with three meetings per day: from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. In view of the large number of representatives already inscribed on the list of speakers for the debate in the plenary, I should like to inform members that I intend to start the plenary meetings punctually at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. In this connection, I would like to assure the Assembly that I shall be in the Chair punctually at the scheduled time. I sincerely hope that all delegations will make a special effort to cooperate in this regard.

With regard to the length of statements in the debate in the plenary, I should like to remind representatives that, on the basis of the decision just adopted by the Assembly, statements should not exceed five minutes. In connection with the time limits, a light system has been installed at the speakers' rostrum, which functions as follows: a green light will be activated at the start of the speaker's statement; an orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes; a red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed. I should like to appeal to speakers in the debate in the plenary to cooperate in observing the time limits of their statements,

so that all those inscribed on the list of speakers for a given meeting will be heard at that meeting.

I should now like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine, in its capacity as Observer, in the sessions and work of the General Assembly.

Members will recall General Assembly resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998 and its annex, as well as a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002, which outlines the Secretary-General's understanding of the implementation of the modalities annexed to the resolution.

I should like to draw the Assembly's attention in particular to paragraph 6 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 52/250, which reads as follows:

"The right to make interventions, with a precursory explanation or the recall of relevant General Assembly resolutions being made only once by the President of the General Assembly at the start of each session of the Assembly."

Accordingly, for the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, the Observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any intervention by Palestine in this session.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The provisional agenda of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-22/1, which has been recommended for adoption by the Commission on Sustainable Development, acting as preparatory body of the twenty-second special session, in draft decision 1 of its report (A/S-22/2). In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in plenary meeting without referring it to the General Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it, then, that the Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-22/1?

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the allocation of items, on the basis of the decision taken by the General Assembly, all the items on the agenda are to be considered directly in plenary meetings.

Agenda item 8 has also been allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-second special session for consideration, on the understanding that the debate on the item shall take place in the plenary Assembly. Under item 8, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will consider two texts, entitled "Draft declaration" and "State of progress and initiatives for the future implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States". Both texts are found in document A/S-22/2/Add.1.

Agenda item 8

Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

The President: I should like to draw the attention of members to document A/S-22/4, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the meeting of representatives of donors and small island developing States, held from 24 to 26 February 1999.

The Assembly will now begin the debate on agenda item 8.

The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana.

President Jagdeo: On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I am pleased to address the General Assembly at this special session, which has been convened to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. These discussions can serve to highlight the special

needs of small island developing States and to indicate the challenges facing the international community in assessing effectively their sustainable development.

We wish to thank the former Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Mr. Simon Upton, for his tireless efforts in steering the work of the Commission in order to prepare for this meeting.

The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States challenged the conscience of the international community. The Barbados Declaration generated great hope for the peoples who live in the States it described as particularly vulnerable to natural as well as environmental disasters and having a limited capacity to respond to and recover from such disasters.

Five years later, the vulnerability to natural phenomena and external economic shock remains stark. A recent draft report by the World Bank has gone so far as to posit that small States are no different from large States; but he who lives it, knows it. But that is the environment in which we have assembled to assess and evaluate our performance in implementing the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Small island and low-lying coastal developing States are not only vulnerable in relation to natural disasters, they are also vulnerable to the increasing pressures posed by the process of globalization, which widens the gap between developed and developing countries. Globalization and liberalization have combined to increase markedly the volatility of the incomes of these countries.

It is critical that the international community address the limitations and vulnerabilities of small island developing States and facilitate their integration into the world economy. They should be assisted to improve their competitiveness, market access, diversification of their economies and their capacity for effective participation in multilateral trade through specific provisions and measures.

The small island developing States have generally tried to fulfil their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. We need to recognize the unique programmes being carried out by local people and local communities in small island States. Great achievements have been made in the areas of climate change, campaigns against

nuclear testing, sustainable tourism and the expansion of protected areas.

The increasingly significant leadership role that the small island States can assume is evidenced by bold initiatives to pursue campaigns of protection and preservation of the natural environment, both at the national level and in international forums.

The role of non-governmental and regional organizations must also be recognized, especially in their efforts to tap into overseas resources and transfers of specialized technical assistance and build capacity. Such actions must be fully supported by the international community.

The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the concept whereby the Caribbean Sea is recognized as a special area in the context of sustainable development. We believe that in asking the international community to recognize the validity of this concept, developing countries have again taken a leadership role in defining the sustainable development agenda. The heavy reliance of island and coastal States on their coastal and marine resources have led to the identification of the need for coordinated and sustainable ocean management. I will not deny that the Group of 77 and China is very disappointed at the adverse reaction which this proposal has received. We remain firmly convinced, however, that a more substantive exchange will lead to broad support for this concept.

While the small island developing States have always acknowledged that implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action is their prime responsibility, likewise the other members of the international community must acknowledge that they, too, are stakeholders in a stable and secure world environment. The commitment of small island developing States has not by and large been met with the same level of commitment in resources from industrialized countries to live up to their side of the partnership for environment and development.

Unless specific cross-sectoral issues, including most prominently finance, trade and transfer of technology are resolved, the proposals for action cannot be translated into reality. Those proposals are directed at specific actions, and we must make it our responsibility to ensure that our efforts so far do not result in statements of good intentions that are starved, once again, of resources.

This special session must vigorously reaffirm the priorities of the international community and the Barbados Programme of Action as the blueprint for sustainable development of small island developing States. A renewed pledge must be made to provide sufficient resources to enable the small island developing States to fully implement sustainable development strategies.

We hope that the positive indications made at the small island developing States donor conference in March will be realized in order to reverse the decline and to fulfil the commitment made at Rio to provide effective means, including adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources.

We would therefore like to take this opportunity to renew the commitment of the Group of 77 to an expeditious and effective implementation of the Barbados Declaration.

The President: I thank the President of the Republic of Guyana for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Honourable Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Western Samoa.

Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa) Mr. President, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 43 member countries of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

We of course support and endorse the statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77. We are delighted to welcome to the United Nations three long-standing AOSIS member States: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

It is only five years since we agreed to the ambitious Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. I think we can all say that we have done our best to implement this comprehensive programme, which highlights the complex array of challenges facing our islands and communities.

Reviewing progress, one would have thought, would be a comparatively easy task. But the negotiations have not been easy, and I believe we must now ask ourselves some necessary questions.

It is important that we ask ourselves: why has it been difficult? It is important that we ask ourselves: is the message we are sending to the world's peoples a powerful one? And, at the end of the day, it is essential that we ask ourselves: have we a common vision for our future — a global future in which islands, their people, cultures and environments are an integral part?

The availability of information should, of course, control any process for review and appraisal. It may be that this was a factor in the negotiations. Certainly our countries would accept the need to ensure, for the future, the proper keeping and broad accessibility of appropriate and accurate data. But it is possible that another reason, perhaps a more fundamental one, relates to the application of, or perhaps the reluctance to apply, the "special case" criterion for small island developing States.

Allow me to say that the nature of this special case evolved from the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and was agreed by us all in Barbados in 1994. Small island developing States are ecologically fragile and economically vulnerable. On that basis they are recognized as a special case both for environment and development. The very essence of this special case has not changed. It is the application that now proves problematic.

A great deal of effort has gone into identifying the concerns and the priorities for the sustainable development of our islands. This is what the Barbados Programme of Action is all about. Our most serious submission to the Assembly is that the Programme deserves an adequate response. One does not build a fishing boat and not go fishing. But unlike the fisherman familiar with his customary fishing grounds, island States in a rapidly globalizing world now find themselves in largely uncharted waters. Accepting reality, we expect changes, perhaps radical ones, to the way we live, both locally and globally. We are aware that solutions will not come overnight. But we would also expect from the international community understanding and support for the consequences such changes will cause for our economies and environments.

Lest there be any mistaking our purpose, let me make clear the determination of all island States to claim ownership of the Barbados Programme of Action, and their acceptance of their primary responsibility for sustainable development. Their first preference is strength and self-reliance. But they have vulnerabilities conditioned by their smallness and "islandness"; and the development and environmental problems confronting them are truly global

in proportion. It is in this specific sense that we seek the application of the special case.

In reviewing what has been achieved, I am proud to say there has been real, if not significant, progress at the national level to move towards sustainable development. This is part of the powerful message we promised in Barbados. As islands throughout the world, we can be proud that in five years we have done our best to put deed to word. Strong partnerships have developed in this time within our countries and our regions. With regard to islands, I think we can say that we are all reading from the same score sheet. Certainly we are trying. But, in the global sense, there is a need to ensure recognition that in fact the agenda for small islands is the agenda for all. This will be the most powerful message.

For small island developing States, many fundamental challenges remain that are central to this common agenda. The power of the message will be measured by how we address these challenges; by how the dangerous threats of global warming and sea level rise are given higher priority by the international community and how developed countries increase their efforts to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases; and by how a coherent approach to ocean management will be made a principal priority if we are to wisely manage this vast global heritage — this is the essential message of the Caribbean special sea resolution — and by measures to ensure that the vulnerable economies of small island States are not marginalized from globalization and trade liberalization. This, of course, is an agenda not solely of external threats. Action at the national level, supported by efficient regional and subregional institutions, must continue to address the fundamental issues for our development.

Continued partnerships will be important if we are to encourage new investment and job creation based on the sustainable management of our limited natural resources. This is particularly true in the areas of renewable energy, sustainable tourism development, agriculture and fisheries, coastal and marine resources, biodiversity resources and freshwater resources.

I believe that the solutions that island communities identify in collaboration with the international community will help others address similar global problems. For this, our island nations look to the international community and the United Nations system for full engagement and support in order to assist our countries in finding and implementing solutions. The difficulties we

face are global in nature, and they call for global responses.

To ensure we can exchange the lessons learned — to ensure we continue to perform as full partners — small island States will need to participate in all relevant international forums. In the international political sense, our numbers are not insignificant, and on many issues, I believe, we can make relevant and worthy contributions.

Further capacity-building measures will be required, especially in areas of relevance to national sustainable development plans. Our oceanic situation and relative isolation mean that modern and adequate communication systems are absolutely vital. This must include the further development of the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET). The SIDSNET is already proving to be an essential vehicle for communication, cooperation and the sharing of information and ideas. And at the international level, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) countries have no doubt of the need to have designated small island developing States focal points, at least within the major United Nations agencies.

In this connection, AOSIS deeply appreciates the willingness of the Government of Norway to assist with the strengthening of the Small Island Developing States Unit of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This is a most generous measure touching directly on a fundamental need for dedicated capacity within the United Nations system to ensure the provision of quality advice and services to small island developing States.

So our message must be action-oriented; it must have both range and strength. We cannot deny the special case for environment and development that exists for small island developing States. It must be applied sensibly in a wide range of forums and circumstances to ensure full and effective participation by islands in the global economy and to ensure that island environments are managed in a sustainable way. There must be a commitment from all of us to this common goal.

If our message is indeed a powerful one, then we shall all be well prepared for a further review of the Barbados Programme of Action, as well as of the decisions of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, in the year 2004.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Vice-President of the Republic of Palau.

Mr. Remengesau (Palau): Palau joins everyone in expressing our utmost appreciation for this special session focusing on small island developing States. Today I feel better, knowing my presence is not just a dot on the map but a part of a community of nations that bear responsibility for a significant portion of the world's oceans and seas and their resources.

We have come a long way from fragmented airings of our unique concerns to regional forums, and now to this unique international forum. We are encouraged that international recognition of and commitment to the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States are being addressed at this level. We call on this body to maintain the spotlight on the issues at hand and to continue pursuing dialogue, negotiations and strategies with donor countries and lending institutions. However, we continue to be a little frustrated, disappointed and, yes, helpless with regard to the rate of action — or lack of action, rather — on the part of our donor partners to comply with the principles and commitments on sustainable development embodied in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Barbados Programme of Action, the Convention on Biological Diversity, Agenda 21, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. It is our hope that the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly will bring about better cooperation and a better relationship between the donor States and the small island developing States so that we can become true partners in sustainable development.

But we do have some positive things to report, as we have taken steps to translate some of the profound principles of the Barbados Programme of Action into policies and actions. The United States and Japan launched the Common Agenda for Cooperation in Global Perspective, incorporating the conservation of coral reefs into chapter 17 of Agenda 21, which was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. This action resulted in the 1995 International Coral Reef Initiative, whereby the Republic of Palau was selected as the site for an international coral reef research centre.

The construction of this centre is funded by Japanese grant assistance, with the United States providing for technical assistance and training support. The centre is expected to be completed next year, will provide a forum for international coral reef research and

education and is designed to improve the management and conservation of Palau's and the world's reefs.

Furthermore, the centre is complemented by the enactment of national laws such as the Natural Heritage Act, the Marine Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. This facility will be part of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The Republic of Palau invites the international community to work with us to study, understand and educate other regions and the international community about the reef and its fragile ecosystem.

In addition, much of our land and mangrove, bay and coastal areas have indeed been designated by State laws as conservation and preservation grounds. Our traditional laws and culture also remain strong today in supporting sustainable development. However, it is in the area of external forces beyond our control that we are most vulnerable, as in industrial forces responsible for climate change and natural disasters.

We call on the developed nations of the world to move forward on their commitments and moral obligations to alternative energy and environmental compliance. We call on the donor countries and institutions to provide the much-needed capital to implement the adopted Programme of Action on sustainable development.

We plead also for world sensitivity and human understanding of the uniqueness and limitations of the small island developing States. In all fairness, the Barbados Programme of Action on sustainable development thus also requires the internal enactment of policies and implementation using local resources. This is just as critical as the requested assistance and actions of the industrialized nations, which are beyond our control.

On the issue of nuclear materials and waste, Palau is proud of its constitutional ban on the storage, use, disposal and trans-shipment of nuclear materials and waste within 200 miles of its archipelago. We join the call for international respect for, and conformity with, this ban. It is not hard to visualize the predicament of our small island State and the complete annihilation of our very existence should an accident occur.

The Republic of Palau wishes to associate itself with the communiqué adopted on 25 September 1999 during the Third Summit of heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

It is expected that the twenty-first century will be the "economic age". We pray that monetary value will not displace human values and that the world will understand that the future of the "little guys" is also the future of their big brothers and that in the end, the survival of the world is dependent on us all — big and small.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus.

President Clerides: It is with great pleasure that I address this special session of the General Assembly in which are participating the heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States. Cyprus considers the holding of this session very important because it provides us, the small island States, with the opportunity to raise certain concerns and discuss issues which in general are important to the international community and more specifically are crucial to the future economic and social development of the small island developing States.

This session also provides us with a forum to review the progress made in the implementation of the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action and to voice our disappointment at the results achieved so far. The Programme called for the close cooperation of the international community with the small island developing States in addressing the sustainable development issues of island States. This emerged from the realization that these States are extremely vulnerable to natural environmental disasters, which adversely affect their developing economies.

Most of the problems confronting small States stem from climate change, which is primarily the result of the carbon dioxide emissions of developed countries. There is therefore a shared responsibility, and there must be common efforts at finding the best solutions which will benefit humanity as a whole.

Proceeding from the Rio Summit documents and the Barbados Programme of Action, Cyprus has adopted an environmental action plan designed to protect the environment and a strategic development plan which aims at the continuous reassessment and upgrading of social and economic policies. Our social policy focuses on the

environment, the protection of our cultural heritage and the overall improvement of the standard of living, which were areas affected by the tragic events of the Turkish invasion of 1974.

Cooperation and coordination among small States is of paramount importance. In this regard, Cyprus is willing to share with other small States its experience and expertise in areas that are of direct interest to them, such as solar energy, sustainable tourism and planning.

Equally important, however, is the cooperation, assistance and shared responsibility of the international community. The support of appropriate initiatives and mechanisms for strengthening regional, national and international cooperation for the prevention and reduction of natural disasters is crucial.

Furthermore, in the light of the continued severity of the debt problems faced by many countries, among them many small island States, the time has come for the international community to further enhance its efforts to remedy the situation.

Another source of concern for small island States is their vulnerability to security threats by their larger and stronger neighbours. The example of Cyprus testifies to the inherent dangers confronting small countries in a world dominated by military strength and not by principles of international law and justice. For 25 years, 37 per cent of the territory of Cyprus has been under foreign military occupation, and attempts are being made to consolidate the division of the island. The human rights of both of its communities are being violated, with the Greek Cypriots forced to live as refugees in their own country and the Turkish Cypriots emigrating to avoid the dire consequences of the importation of settlers from eastern Turkey.

Repeated efforts under the auspices of the United Nations have not brought about the desired settlement of the Cyprus problem due to the intransigence of the Turkish side. We are now on the eve of the most important initiative for the international community, and the Secretary-General is expected soon to invite the two sides to negotiate. The Greek Cypriot side will participate in a spirit of goodwill, courage and genuine desire to find a lasting solution to the Cyprus problem based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. We urge the Turkish side to respond positively to the call of the G-8, the Security Council, the European Union and the Non-Aligned Movement for negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General and to approach

negotiations as an opportunity to bring about a common future of prosperity, dignity and respect of the human rights of all Cypriots, without any discrimination.

Speaking for small States, I would like to underline that it is imperative that the solution of the Cyprus problem be in conformity with justice. An unjust solution will create a bad precedent. Small States will never feel secure nor will they trust the collective security systems or the peaceful settlement mechanism enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

With the coming of the new millennium, let us all cooperate to create the necessary climate to help small island States face their challenges, be they security concerns, economic issues or environmental priorities. We must pass from the recognition and awareness of problems to practical steps in order to cure the acute problems small island States are facing today. The international community has a responsibility to assist its small members in meeting their needs and in providing them with opportunities to develop and prosper in a highly interdependent world.

The President: I thank the President of the Republic of Cyprus for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Leo Amy Falcam, President of the Federated States of Micronesia.

President Falcam: At the time my country joined the United Nations, in 1991, the Rio Earth Summit was merely a fledgling idea. Negotiations on climate change were ongoing at the time. However, the idea that small island States would receive special recognition seemed radical. Anyone suggesting then that the world would eventually come together for a conference specifically on the situation of small island States would have been considered a dreamer. Who would have imagined that a Programme of Action would be presented, and that in 1999 its progress would be reviewed in a special session of the United Nations General Assembly. But that is exactly what we are doing here, and we must therefore thank the numerous delegates and officials, past and present, whose hard work and dedication have made it possible for us to be here today.

The issues that we are dealing with are not only relevant to the humanitarian role of the United Nations under the Charter, but also critical to all nations. This is an excellent opportunity to further the work already

under way and to encourage even stronger measures as we enter the twenty-first century. Overall, it is my Government's view that implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action has been slow. Small island States have, for instance, experienced a significant decline over the past five years in receipts of official development assistance. The Government of the Federated States of Micronesia attended the recent small island developing States donors conference with high hopes. At that time, we presented the comprehensive measures we had undertaken to pursue sustainability, and highlighted the unmet needs whose fulfilment we feel is critical to capacity-building and institutional strengthening. We are eager to proceed to the next stage and hope that this session will provide the impetus to set the wheels of action into motion.

Modernization has, unfortunately, taken us further away from our traditional sustainable practices, but the mandate of the Barbados Programme of Action enables us to face the future with hope and confidence. I am pleased to report that my people and Government have already embarked on this new journey. For instance, although they have been painful and difficult, we have successfully implemented structural adjustments and reforms that include drastic Government downsizing. The Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia chairs a Sustainable Development Council that monitors implementation of sustainable mechanisms in the nation. In 1995, we convened our first ever national and state economic summits, and only last month concluded the second economic summit to evaluate our progress. My Government has also made use of outside assistance for sound economic policy planning and management. This function will eventually be integrated into and developed from within the Government. The United Nations Development Programme has also been instrumental in providing for the institutional capacity development of the private sector.

The full fruition of such initiatives depends on the Government's political will and on the willingness to take difficult actions despite great political risk. It also hinges on the continued financial and technical assistance from our bilateral, regional and multilateral donors. To put it bluntly, the islands need help and will continue to need help. We must take positive and urgent action on these critical issues, or small islands will serve only as disastrous examples of global complacency and inaction. As I stated last week in the General Assembly, the business-as-usual attitude on critical global issues is no longer adequate.

I must recognize the signs of progress under the Barbados Programme of Action. Although progress has been slow, we are beginning to see some benefits through such institutions as the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme. The term "adaptation" is no longer considered a dirty word in the context of the climate change Convention. The deadly consequences of deteriorating coral reefs, improper fisheries management and inadequate freshwater resources have all been put on the global agenda.

I have one final concern. Many donors seem content to lump our small island States into one generic category. In the Pacific region alone, it is possible to find low-lying coral atolls, high volcanic islands, desertic climates and lush rainforests. Island States have varying characteristics and must be dealt with individually. Developmental assistance must be based not solely on static gross national product or population figures. It must also be tailored to the various terrestrial and maritime characteristics that contribute to the uniqueness of each island nation.

The decisions to be made are difficult indeed. Thus, I appeal to the donors that have so generously supported the Barbados Programme of Action and plead for all nations to proceed with the sense of urgency that our global reality demands today. With the continuing support and encouragement of this great Organization and the donor community, our problems can be overcome.

The President: I thank the President of the Federated States of Micronesia for his statement.

I call now on Mr. Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar.

Mr. Aung (Myanmar): It is a great honour and pleasure for me to have this opportunity to participate in the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Just as we take cognizance of the particular needs of the vulnerable sectors of our populations at the national level and at the global level, we are similarly aware of the special needs of the more vulnerable States members of the international community. That awareness led the international community in 1994, at Bridgetown, Barbados, to adopt the Programme of Action for the

Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. That Programme constitutes the most significant blueprint adopted by the international community for the sustainable development of those unique States. I wish to take this opportunity to express our strong support for more active implementation of the Programme.

The sustainable development of small island developing States is more than a simple question of development; it is a question of survival that deserves the utmost attention from the international community, as a matter of urgency, owing to the unique problems and vulnerability of those States. The Barbados Programme of Action contains binding commitments, and those commitments need to be fully met. The Programme cannot be fully implemented in the absence of the international community's fulfilment of those strong commitments.

The effective implementation of the Programme of Action has been hampered mainly by factors beyond the control of small island developing States. The principal factors include, among others, inadequate financial and human resources, and inadequate institutional capacity. For that reason, there is an imperative need for the international community to help small island developing States remove these factors through the provision of adequate, predictable and additional financial resources. On the other hand, as they have been encouraged to do by donors, small island developing States should identify their priority areas, those that need urgent attention, in line with their national objectives. In that way, the financing of the most important projects in the priority areas of the country concerned could be given focused attention. In this respect, established mechanisms at the bilateral level between the countries concerned and donors are, in our view, effective channels for consultations on projects of immediate importance at the regional level. Hence, coordination and cooperation between focal points of small island developing States, the establishment of permanent regional implementation mechanisms, the strengthening of existing regional arrangements, and the adoption of a wide participatory approach in determining specific needs and priorities are all important steps that would accelerate the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

All components of the Programme have been reviewed on various occasions. Similarly, progress made in the implementation of the Programme has been assessed. As a result of these reviews, we have been able to identify areas that require urgent attention. In addition, the review process has shed light on the specific constraints and priorities of every small island developing State. It is

encouraging that, in fulfilling their commitments under the Programme, these States have made considerable efforts. Those efforts are indeed commendable. However, the issue of financial resources remains crucial to enable small island developing States to deal with a wide range of priority areas. It is high time that the international financial institutions and the bilateral and multilateral donors dealt with this issue as a matter of priority. The willingness of major financial institutions to show flexibility in exploring means to assist small island States is therefore a step in the right direction. We firmly believe that the present historic session will provide an opportunity to forge a strengthened partnership on a firmer and more predictable basis.

If I may be allowed to use an analogy, small island developing States are like infants on unsure legs. It is incumbent upon the international community to nurture them, encourage them and help them stand on their own. I urge all concerned not only to renew, but also to fulfil their commitments to the comprehensive and full implementation of the Programme of Action.

The President: I call next on Mrs. Rosario Green, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico.

Mrs. Green (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The issue that brings us together is a high priority for all nations, and Mexico therefore reaffirms today its commitment to policies and activities aimed at enhancing the measures that all countries, including small island States, are taking to reconcile economic growth with the protection of the environment.

In that context, I wish to describe Mexico's experience of cooperation with island States of the Caribbean Sea. Historical, geographic, political, economic and cultural ties of special significance link us with those countries, which constitute our "third border". We are working together with them to formulate strategies of cooperation and mechanisms for dialogue both bilaterally and at the regional level, through agreements on technical, scientific, cultural and educational cooperation. Our regional commitment is reflected also in our presence as an observer at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and in our full membership of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).

Specifically, at the second summit of the Association of Caribbean States, held in the Dominican Republic last April, the Foreign Ministers of those States signed an agreement on regional cooperation on natural disasters. In that spirit, Mexico has promoted four projects on natural-disaster prevention, in collaboration with the Caribbean centre for disaster research and management of the University of the West Indies.

Moreover, in my statement in the general debate of the fifty-fourth session, I noted the urgency of defining an international division of labour to address natural disasters creatively and effectively. Such an international division of labour would help us in a faster and more timely manner to meet the needs of populations afflicted by these phenomena. It would establish a speedy, appropriate system enabling us to take better advantage of international cooperation in all phases of a disaster, from prevention and early warning to emergency action and mitigation, as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction. For that purpose we have asked the Secretary-General to ensure that the United Nations assumes its responsibility and its leadership in this endeavour.

In a different context, as Chairman of the Special Committee on Tourism of the Association of Caribbean States, Mexico has spearheaded its main project to date: the establishment of a sustainable tourism zone in the Caribbean. Mexico also chairs the ACS Special Fund and is the Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee on the Protection and Conservation of the Environment and the Caribbean Sea.

In both of these forums, the Government of Mexico works with firm commitment and will to contribute to the preservation of this important habitat.

Allow me now to share with the Assembly some thoughts of my delegation on the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action now before us.

First, we consider it necessary to have financing mechanisms that provide us with additional economic resources in order to avoid hindering the full implementation of the Programme.

Secondly, we deem it indispensable to promote new strategies of collaboration and forms of partnership to foster genuine cooperation with the small island developing States.

Thirdly, my Government considers it essential to comply with international agreements in the fields of climate change, biological diversity and desertification, since solutions to global environmental problems are closely linked with the survival of all countries in this group. We are also committed to the "clean development" mechanism provided for in the Kyoto Protocol to facilitate cooperation between developing and more advanced countries. Mexico also considers that the biosafety protocol, currently under negotiation, will help reconcile the goal of protecting biological wealth, with the derivation of benefits from biotechnology.

My delegation is convinced that the moment has arrived to face the challenge of finding new and realistic formulas to propel the sustainable development of the small island States. We cannot delay any longer.

Mexico wishes to express its support for the Barbados Programme of Action and offers its solidarity to assist in accomplishing its goals.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Boris Tarasyuk.

Mr. Tarasyuk (Ukraine): Today we are discussing one of the most acute problems on the global agenda. The lessons learned in the process of implementing the decisions adopted in Bridgetown, five years ago, vividly prove the vital and global nature of the goals identified in the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action. The problems of small island developing States and the promotion of their sustainable development have gradually become priorities for the relevant United Nations bodies and its specialized agencies.

This unique group of States is now facing new challenges caused by global economic and ecological developments. By opening broad opportunities for the integration of small island States into the world economic space, globalization has made the success of their economic policies dependent on their foreign trade. However, the pace of trade liberalization over recent years, the remoteness of island countries from major markets, trade and financial centres, and the negative impact of recent financial crises jeopardize the attainment of the goals set forth in the Programme of Action.

That is why the risk of marginalization in the course of establishing a new economic order makes it necessary for the world community to concentrate its attention on

the problems of this overlooked group of countries. We believe that the key factors for ensuring the sustainability of their development are the elimination of trade barriers, provision of access for goods from small island States to world markets and preferential transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

Ukraine can well comprehend the small island States' problems, since we are still coping with those caused by the Chernobyl disaster. Almost 100,000 square kilometres of Ukrainian territory have been contaminated, over 200,000 people resettled. Hundreds have died of radiation, and thousands still suffer from it.

Ukraine also experiences the negative influence of some of the phenomena affecting the island States. The coastal area of Ukraine, particularly the Crimean peninsula, also suffers from pollution caused by human activities on land which affects fragile coastal ecosystems. The vulnerability of the national economy because of its openness and its dependence on imports of natural resources and the negative impact of human activities on the environment — this is not just an abstract notion for my country in its gradual transition to a market economy.

The urgent need to preserve the unique biodiversity of coastal and marine ecosystems makes it necessary to bring together efforts of the world community at all levels — global, regional, subregional and national. Small island developing States are inherently exposed to devastating natural disasters, in particular to such phenomena as El Niño. We believe that the successful mitigation of the consequences of such disasters largely depends on well-coordinated efforts by the entire international community to share their scientific knowledge and to create early warning systems and other preventive mechanisms for the protection of the population.

In this regard, we consider the accomplishment of work on a vulnerability index for small island States to be extremely important. This index should comprise all the necessary parameters for the creation of a favourable framework for the development of these countries through enhanced cooperation with the international community. We believe that the elaboration of an integrated vulnerability index would also help address social problems such as poverty and unemployment, which have deep roots in some of the small island States.

Having great experience and sophisticated methods of long-term meteorological and earthquake forecasting, particularly for coastal regions, Ukraine stands ready to

further develop its cooperation with small island States in this field. Our space and air facilities for remote probing could be used for prospecting and assessment of natural resources in these countries. We are also prepared to provide our advanced technology and experience for preventing the erosion of coastlines, in particular the designing and construction of breakwaters. Apart from this, Ukraine could offer the aid of its fleet of scientific vessels for research purposes aimed at the preservation of coastal ecosystems, primarily of coral reefs.

Our country has long experience in providing broad professional training to nationals of many developing countries, including the small island ones. We are ready to continue to provide assistance in training personnel from small island States in our educational and scientific institutions, in particular in the domain of climatology and meteorology.

During these five years after the Barbados Conference, we have witnessed consistent efforts by small island developing States to meet their commitments under the Programme of Action. We hope that this special session of the General Assembly will give additional impetus to the Programme of Action's efficient implementation and to the introduction of innovative mechanisms for addressing the acute problems of those nations. We believe that full implementation of the Barbados decisions will not only promote sustainable development in this group of States but also contribute to the social and economic progress of the whole of mankind.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, His Excellency The Honourable George Odlum.

Mr. Odlum (Saint Lucia): There is a distinctly cruel irony in referring to this session as a special session of the General Assembly for small island developing States. The treatment received from donor countries is anything but special. Admittedly, we are small States, but in the current international atmosphere one questions whether we can qualify for the title "developing". While we applaud the concern that led Member States to convene this review session, the failure of developed countries to enter into the spirit of international cooperation has withered the dream. Our hopes have withered, like a raisin in the sun.

The summary of the review is that the situation of small island developing States has changed, but for the

worse, heightening the urgency with which the international community must address the critical, disadvantaged situation of small island developing States. These States are still vulnerable to natural disasters, which have intensified over the years, increasing the extent of damage and fatalities over their small land masses and populations. There has been extensive damage to infrastructure and to economies, with high per capita reconstruction costs that are beyond the reach of small island developing States.

In 1995 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that there had been a rise in the mean surface temperature of the earth. For small island developing States this means higher sea levels, coastal erosion, loss of land mass, contamination of freshwater resources and a threat to biodiversity. It is estimated that the Caribbean alone could be forced to spend \$1.1 billion on new construction to protect against sea level rise.

The ravages of natural disasters are graphically demonstrated by the recent occurrences in Montserrat, Papua New Guinea and the Bahamas, requiring millions of dollars in recovery costs. During the period 1977-1996, 44 small island developing States were struck by 153 cyclones or hurricanes.

The small island developing States are also vulnerable to problems that are non-natural, economic and external in nature. They include changes in international commodity prices and international demand for goods and services, as well as an erosion of preferences. Data from the 1980s indicated that for 30 small island developing States, freight and insurance costs represented 13 per cent of the value of imports, while the ratio was estimated at less than 6 per cent for developed countries.

The ecological vulnerabilities of small island developing States are well established. The natural vulnerabilities we have little control over. The inherent economic vulnerabilities we are limited in our capacity to address. The most devastating economic vulnerability is external, and consequently beyond our control. However, it is predictable, and, curiously, it is not being addressed by the international community.

The vulnerability of small island developing States and their sustainable development must be put in the current context of globalization and trade liberalization. Saint Lucia is a typical case of a small vulnerable island developing State. In the context of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, Saint Lucia has acceded to several regional and international agreements and conventions.

Nationally, many pieces of environmental legislation are on our statute books.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling against preferential treatment for our bananas on the European Union market resulted in a 50 per cent decline in our exports from 1992 to 1997. The number of active banana growers engaged in the industry fell by 35 per cent over that period. It is expected that 2,200 farmers will be removed from the industry and that this will directly affect 10,000 persons.

In summary, poverty has increased in Saint Lucia, and we are still assessing the social repercussions, which manifest themselves in crime, drugs and social decay. The United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Index* showed Saint Lucia as having the sharpest decline in the Caribbean, tumbling 23 places, from fifty-eighth last year to eighty-first this year. This is the desperate impact of globalization and trade liberalization on Saint Lucia.

The sustainable development of Saint Lucia and that of other small island developing States is threatened by the greed of transnational corporations, which, in the globalizing economy, replace Governments in setting trade rules and standards. We are now developing corporations and maximizing profits, and not developing people. The motive is expansion of markets and increased profits for transnational corporations, and not the development of people or the sustainable development of countries. In essence, this is globalization, which small island developing States are forced to accept as the only option for future development and growth.

It is a globalizing world where the rich continue to prosper at the expense of the weak and vulnerable. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries can boast about the opportunities and benefits of globalization, because they have crafted the globalizing market to their advantage, ignoring the needs of the vast majority of the world. They are deliberately perpetuating, at our expense, through the WTO, the presupposition that one system is right for the economic growth of all countries, when the record shows that, since the Bretton Woods institutions designed the economic system after the Second World War, poverty has increased, and the gap between developed and developing countries continues to widen.

Despite the increasing wealth of OECD countries, official development assistance to small island developing

States continues to decline. In 1994 the net disbursements for bilateral and multilateral aid for small island developing States were \$2.36 billion. By 1997 they had dropped to \$1.96 billion, and they continue to decline. The World Bank and the international community continue to deliberately rank our countries by the inaccurate gauge of gross national product per capita. This does not take account of our vulnerabilities.

Some of our developed partners continue to use the Caribbean Sea, which is of such vital importance to our economic development, for the transboundary movement of hazardous and radioactive waste. Yet they continue to question our right to ban such practices, and they resist the revision of international law to make provision for the protection of the Caribbean Sea. Saint Lucia calls on its partners and the international community to support the draft resolution to make the Caribbean Sea a special area, given its critical role in our development.

The report of the review is disheartening. There has been little contribution from the international community to small island developing States and little progress towards achieving sustainable development. The agreed text indicates no firm commitment to address the vulnerabilities. It makes no specific provisions for their sustainable development in the multilateral financial, monetary and trade systems. There is no clear intention of granting special and differential treatment based on environmental and economic vulnerabilities.

We need time and financing from our developed partners, who are benefiting from the globalizing economy, in order to diversify our economies and stem the sharp economic downturns that globalization is meting out to us.

We need technical assistance to build our capacity to compete globally. We need, in the Caribbean alone, \$1.1 billion for new construction to protect us against sea-level rise. We need the United Nations to play its role in the protection of its weak and vulnerable Members in the globalizing world, to complete the vulnerability index and to promote it as a significant criterion in ranking countries for concessional and preferential treatment. We need a United Nations that plays a central role in the governance of globalization to ensure the sharing of benefits based on equality and equity for the development of all people.

These small island developing States are perched precariously on the continental shelf of our vulnerability. The tidal waves of globalization can sweep us into the unfathomable depths; they can decimate our populations;

they can reduce us to a statistic in a gust of absent-mindedness. For us, development means survival because we are bereft of the safety nets which our developed partners take for granted. We need a new mindset, a new way of perceiving underdevelopment, a new global philosophy which will give priority and precedence to the wretched of the Earth.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jaswant Singh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of India.

Mr. Singh (India): The image of India that generally comes to mind is of a large land mass, but India is much more than that. It has the extremely diverse geo-profile of a subcontinent with some of the world's highest mountains, hot and cold deserts, and more than 1,300 island territories, amongst the largest in the world.

As Chairman of the Island Development Authority of India, I have personally dealt with the particularities and challenges of developing small islands while simultaneously protecting their fragile ecosystems and unique environments. India's development experience, commitment to growth with equity, dedication to self-reliance and attachment to the cause of South-South cooperation provide for a truly unique paradigm and have given us a wide experience, developed in the service of our people, which we wish to share.

We are fully conscious of the special needs and requirements of small island developing States and empathize with them. In the last five years, we have strengthened existing ties and established new links with small island developing States. Soon after the Barbados Conference, we opened a resident mission at ambassadorial level in Papua New Guinea and established diplomatic relations with Haiti, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau. We invigorated our links with their regional organizations. We have observer status with the Association of Caribbean States.

More than 30 small island countries are now covered under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) for project assistance, covering deputation of Indian experts, training of nationals of partner island States in premier Indian institutions, and short-term study visits to India for their senior officers and decision-makers. Last year alone, over 80,000 man-hours of training were provided in India to 130 nationals of small island States, in fields ranging

from diplomatic service to management, audit and accounts, and small scale industries, responding to the needs of capacity-building so well articulated in the Barbados Programme. We are familiar from our own experience with the aspirations to self-reliance.

Nearly 60 per cent of Indian experts deputed abroad under our technical cooperation Programme are working in small island nations in the fields of agriculture, geology, legislative drafting, teaching, marine engineering, fish toxicity, medicine and nursing and other areas, all of which our partner countries have identified as areas where they need our cooperation. Several infrastructural projects, such as the construction of hospitals, are also being undertaken in selected small island developing countries under ITEC.

Significant climatic variability over the last few years has produced disasters of unprecedented magnitude and devastation in some of these countries. Again, despite constraints, we have attempted to lend a helping hand in such humanitarian emergencies, be it to the victims of Hurricanes Mitch and Georges or the severe drought in Papua New Guinea in September 1997, followed by the tidal wave in June last year.

We propose to continue, in the spirit of South-South solidarity, to enhance our cooperation with our partners in the small islands and to impart to it a greater regional focus, building on the concept of multiple beneficiaries put forward by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We also have much to learn from them, not least in the development of the tourism sector. We have entered into tourism agreements with some of them so as to learn from their experiences.

Our contributions to the development of small island developing nations and to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action are of necessity a small part of the efforts that are required from the international community. It is essential that the international community and those more fortunate than us shoulder their responsibilities for the provision of adequate assistance to the small island developing nations. Similarly, they should promote the transfer of appropriate technologies to them on preferential and concessional terms. Other aspects related to the special vulnerabilities of these States also need to be urgently addressed.

We sincerely hope that when we meet in a special session in 2004 to review comprehensively the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, it

will be to applaud the success of such international cooperation, whose lack today we lament.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Satu Hassi, Minister for Environment and Development Cooperation of Finland, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mrs. Hassi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country member of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

The small island developing States are rich and diverse in cultural heritage, with traditional knowledge of sound management of resources and special skills of adaptation to the island environment. Small island developing States represent a large share of global biodiversity resources and host a large number of endemic species of flora and fauna. For small island developing States the ocean and coastal environment are of strategic importance, constituting a valuable development resource. They bear responsibility for a significant portion of the world's oceans and seas and their resources. However, small island developing States are ecologically fragile and vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather conditions. While small island developing States are among those that contribute least to global climate change and sea level rise, they are among those that will suffer most from it and, in some cases, could even become uninhabitable. Therefore, it is our clear priority to make all possible efforts to slow down and ultimately prevent climate change.

The economies of small island developing States are dependent on a narrow resource base and are highly susceptible to fluctuations in global trade in a small range of commodities. This adds to their economic vulnerability. Since the Rio and Barbados Conferences, many small island developing States have achieved commendable momentum in establishing an institutional basis and in creating a conducive policy environment. It is important that there be a focus on the elimination of poverty. Many small island developing States continue to be affected by poverty and have to contend with serious problems of social exclusion. Poverty undermines the

capacity for sustainable development and should therefore be given high priority in national policies.

Human resources are significant assets of small island developing States, and the central role of people in development must be nurtured. We must seek to improve people's quality of life in all its dimensions, including their health, well-being and safety. Although commendable efforts have been made, the need for human resources in small island developing States can be met only over a long period of time. The same applied to developing adequate institutional infrastructure and administrative capacity to deal with a number of emerging concerns, such as the continuing deterioration of the marine environment, threats to marine biodiversity, issues of freshwater and land degradation, increased frequency and severity of natural disasters and serious economic difficulties, partly due to external factors.

The European Union would like to recall that the globalization of the economy has expanded since the Barbados Conference. While this has offered new opportunities to countries that have the necessary capacity in terms of human resources, technology and natural resource endowment, it has bypassed a number of disadvantaged countries and communities, in particular the least developed of the small island developing States, which risk becoming marginalized.

The European Union also wishes to point out the opportunities. International recognition since Rio and Barbados of specific factors which influence small island developing States has placed their issues high on the political agenda, as this special session attests. The emphasis given by Governments to the elaboration of national and regional sustainable development strategies provides a major opportunity for setting and readjusting political priorities. In the view of the European Union, the priority given in these strategies to strengthening human and institutional capacities, including poverty alleviation and gender balance, provide opportunities for a better future.

We also think that the intensified search by Governments to forge partnerships with the private sector and other major groups and actors provides new opportunities. In Rio in 1992, and likewise in the small island developing States donors' consultations last February, we emphasized the need for better coordination of development efforts. But further efforts are still needed. For the European Community and its member States, the Lomé Convention and its mechanisms constitute the

centrepiece of cooperation with small island developing States.

The European Union attaches great importance to the conclusion of the new post-Lomé agreement, which will be a flexible instrument of cooperation and partnership. In this regard, the European Union supports the need to give special consideration to small island developing States, in particular the least developed among them, and to their vulnerability.

For the period 1996-2000, the European Community is committing over 1 billion euros in development assistance to small island developing States in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. High priority is being given to reaching the poorest groups and women. This assistance is in addition to significant contributions from member States.

In the field of international trade, the European Union is making considerable efforts to ensure that the successor convention to the Lomé Convention, as well as the millennium round of multilateral negotiations on multilateral trade at the World Trade Organization, will further reduce the remaining trade barriers and provide small island developing States with more secure access to export markets for their products.

Let me conclude by saying that the European Union is pleased to have had this opportunity to focus the attention of all members on the specific issues pertaining to small island countries. This is also an opportunity to renew our commitment to the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and to adopt a new political declaration to that effect.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Seymour Mullings, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica.

Mr. Mullings: This is a very important occasion for every small island developing State represented here today. This special session, convened formally to review implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, presents us with the rare opportunity to bring to the wider international community the challenges and continuing concerns shared by our special group of countries.

We, the members of the Alliance of Small Island States, affirm a unique identity defined by the particular limitations and vulnerabilities characteristic of small island developing States. The continued application of the single income measure — per capita gross national product — to determine the well-being of a nation and its eligibility for assistance and special consideration can do great injustice. A relatively high per capita gross national product in the face of uneven income distribution often masks the fact that the majority of the population subsists below the poverty line. Wealth therefore becomes relative when with one sudden unforeseen event, a country's entire physical infrastructure and its major industries can be critically damaged or destroyed by natural disaster.

More recently, evidence of the degree of our economic vulnerability has strengthened the validity of our cause. The process of globalization and trade liberalization has increased the risk of economic marginalization for most small island developing States. The well-known characteristics of our small island economies have limited the capacity of our countries to compete effectively in the new multilateral trading system. We have witnessed a dramatic erosion in market share for our narrow range of export products, and structural deficiencies which have undermined our efforts at diversification have set us at a disadvantage where tapping new opportunities in the global marketplace is concerned.

It was recognition of the vulnerabilities uniquely characteristic of small island developing States that brought the international community together five years ago to map a strategy for the very survival of small island developing States. We should not forget that it was on the basis of a shared objective to assist small island developing States in addressing these limitations that the covenant for joint action through the measures outlined in the Barbados Programme of Action was made.

As we meet on this occasion to review the implementation of the Programme of Action, it is important that we reaffirm our collective commitment to the principles and strategies for development outlined in Barbados. The Barbados Programme of Action was the earliest expression of the spirit of global partnership engendered at Rio. It established this cooperative approach as an essential prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. The failure of the international community to provide the necessary support, particularly through the infusion of new resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action, is therefore very disappointing.

We need to recapture that spirit of partnership and cooperation. We cannot afford to retreat from the commitments made in Barbados if our goal of sustainable development through joint action is to be achieved.

There are a number of initiatives which Jamaica considers should be included among the priority issues for follow-up as we pursue the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. Work on the development of a vulnerability index for small island developing States should continue. The use of such an index as one of the criteria for determining special consideration for small island developing States in the arenas of multilateral trade and finance remains a principal objective of our States. We therefore look forward to the early completion of this project, and we strongly encourage continued study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other relevant agencies in the United Nations system on the vulnerabilities that limit our capacity for sustained development. We thank the Secretary-General for his support for ongoing work in this area.

We also underscore the need for special consideration within UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization of these vulnerabilities and limitations which undermine the efforts of small island developing States to participate meaningfully and effectively in the global market place.

Greater financial support from the international community for the development efforts of small island developing States is essential. We share the concerns already expressed at the overall decline in concessionary financing for developing countries and join the call for increased official development assistance.

Jamaica welcomes efforts to address the effects of global warming on small island developing States. Coral bleaching is of particular concern to Jamaica, as is the increased instability of weather patterns induced by the warming of the world's oceans. We maintain active involvement in the International Coral Reef Initiative, and we are currently implementing a national policy on coral reef protection and regulation.

Of crucial concern to Jamaica is the effective management and development of coastal and marine resources, on which the country is heavily dependent. Our coastal zone sustains important industries, such as tourism and fisheries, providing livelihood for large coastal communities. Protection of our marine resources

from land- and ship-generated pollution is integral to our broader strategy for the management of these resources. The international community accepted at Barbados a clear and unequivocal statement from the small island developing States on the importance of protecting our seas from pollution, and particularly from the risk presented by the transportation of hazardous and radioactive materials through our waters. Jamaica unreservedly reiterates that position.

Capacity-building remains a central tool for the sustainable development effort. The strengthening of institutional capacity and human resource development continue to receive priority attention in Jamaica's development strategy. We also stress the importance of a participatory approach for sustainable development, involving shared responsibility between government, local communities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. A strong public education campaign such as we have recently launched would aid the success of this effort.

The transfer of appropriate technology to facilitate the development and application of approaches to environmental issues and access to genetic resources for research and commercial uses are of increasing importance to Jamaica.

We continue to stress the importance of an effective poverty eradication programme as an integral part of the wider strategy for sustainable development, particularly given the steady increase in the numbers of urban poor. Poverty eradication must remain an important facet of a people-centred approach to development.

Jamaica is among the countries of the wider Caribbean which have brought for the consideration of this special session a resolution to recognize the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development. It is our desire to establish a regime for the wide protection of the Caribbean Sea and for the sustainable development of the region's marine resources and related industries. This effort is born of our increased awareness of the fragility of the marine ecosystems of the Caribbean, on which our economic viability is heavily dependent. Jamaica joins the other Caribbean delegations in inviting the international community to favourably consider this important initiative.

This meeting offers us an important opportunity to assess the way forward. Our agenda for the achievement of sustainable development is an urgent one, and we have a

unique opportunity to renew our commitment to a strategy which will promote the optimum quality of life for inhabitants of small islands for generations to come. Let us address this undertaking soberly and with a deep sense of obligation, always mindful that we are the custodians of the common heritage of mankind.

The President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Mr. Downer (Australia): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address this special session of the General Assembly, especially on such an important issue as the sustainable development of small island developing States.

The goal of maintaining the environmental integrity of small island States while promoting their economic and social development lies at the very core of the Barbados Programme of Action. And these are issues that are also very close to Australia's heart.

Australians particularly value the many cultural, political and economic ties we share with our neighbours in the small island States of the Pacific, relationships that are cemented by firm friendship. Our ties are strong, and growing ever stronger. We are proud to be one of the largest donors to small island developing States, providing an estimated A\$ 470 million in grant aid in 1999-2000. Since the Programme of Action was agreed five years ago, our development assistance has totalled well over A\$ 2 billion.

This special session is a powerful affirmation of the importance of a strong and committed partnership between small island developing States and the international community.

I want today to outline Australia's commitment to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in small island States — a commitment to building close partnerships. I will keep my remarks brief, but the Australian delegation will distribute a more detailed document outlining Australian support for the Programme's implementation.

Australian activities under the Programme of Action are consistent with our general approach to development assistance issues. All relevant Australian development assistance activities incorporate strategies to address environmental sustainability. Every proposed activity is

developed in close consultation and partnership with recipient countries, starting with a jointly agreed country strategy. In the Pacific, our practice of close partnership is extended significantly through Australian membership and funding of all Pacific regional organizations, such as the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission.

Australian aid is delivered in a strategic manner, aimed squarely at meeting long-term goals which are affirmed regularly through consultation with our partners. In this context, our support for the Barbados Programme of Action cannot be separated from the whole of our development cooperation activity. Aid activity in support of the Programme takes place in the context of agreed country and regional programmes that have at their core the principles of sustainable development.

We were pleased to participate in the Small Island Developing States donor conference in February this year, which we saw as a valuable forum for canvassing a range of possible cooperative activities in support of the Barbados Programme. The Australian Government will be actively considering those activities in our regular consultations with partner Governments and with the regional organizations in the Pacific.

Australia already provides substantial assistance for tackling issues identified in the Programme of Action. We provide more than A\$ 40 million each year for environmentally focused projects in small island States. Australia also has a major stake in education projects, with more than 800 tertiary students from Pacific and Indian Ocean islands currently in Australia on aid-funded scholarships — students who will make an important contribution to the sustainable development of their countries.

While most of our aid for small island States supports Pacific island countries, our programme does have a wider focus. One Australian activity of particular relevance to the Barbados Programme of Action will start shortly in Maldives. The project will build institutional and human resource capacity in Government and the community to support the establishment of a system of marine and terrestrial protected areas.

It is vitally important to increase the participation of small island States in the decision-making processes that affect them. In 1981, at Australia's suggestion and with our funding, the Commonwealth of Nations set up an office here to help small Commonwealth States participate in United Nations meetings. We continue to support that

office. Similarly, we were very pleased to be able to provide funds to facilitate participation by small island developing States at discussions of the Barbados Programme of Action.

Before I conclude, I want to make some brief observations on the impact of globalization on small States and the issue of small State vulnerability. The opportunities arising from increased global trade and economic integration are, of course, enormous. But there are also significant challenges in ensuring that all countries share in the benefits.

We must help small island developing States, and other developing countries, take advantage of the multilateral trading system. Future trade negotiations need to be balanced and to have a balanced agenda. The concerns of low-income and small and vulnerable economies should be taken into account.

Similarly, small island States lack the resilience and capacity to absorb economic and environmental external shocks from, for example, the El Niño phenomenon or from climate change. For that reason, I am pleased that the text before us encourages widespread recognition of the economic and environmental vulnerability of small States. If agreement on a single measure of vulnerability proves elusive, the international community must find alternative methods to describe, analyse and address what are very real difficulties for small island States.

The issues before us are complex, the challenges numerous and formidable and the needs pressing. But much valuable work has already been done, and I am sure that with commitment, partnership, and international support the goals of the Barbados Programme of Action of achieving truly sustainable development for small island developing States can be realized.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jérémie Bonnelame, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Seychelles.

Mr. Bonnelame (Seychelles): Mr. President, my delegation is pleased to see you presiding over this special session of the General Assembly.

Five years ago we negotiated and adopted the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action for small island developing States. This promised greater understanding by the international community for our special case and concerns. It also presented us with the

opportunity to articulate our goals and aspirations for sustainable development in a spirit of genuine cooperation with our development partners.

The difficulties and challenges that small States have to overcome have been well documented, most recently in the discussion of the draft paper on small States prepared by Joint Task Force of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank. I will therefore only underline very briefly a few of the specificities that pertain to the Seychelles and to other small island developing States.

The first specificity is the lack of economies of scale. With a population of only 80,000, our difficulties in attracting investment can be appreciated. The limited market potential and the related high per capita costs of operation, provision of services and infrastructure remain a constant challenge.

The second specificity is our limited resources and their fragility. In the case of Seychelles, such resources form the basis of our tourism and fisheries industries. In both areas we are fully aware that unsustainable practices can lead to the destruction of our livelihoods. This partly explains why Seychelles has no less than 40 per cent of its limited land area protected under its Environment Protection Act. But despite all the measures taken, we are still faced with factors beyond our control, such as the adverse effects of climate change.

The third specificity is our isolation, remoteness and dispersion. Seychelles is an archipelago of over 100 islands situated very far from any market. Our remoteness and insularity have implications with regard to transport and transaction costs.

This leads me to my fourth point, which is our limited institutional and financial capabilities. This keeps us from being adequately represented both in the diplomatic world and in forums of international negotiations, especially in relation to finance, trade and environment. On this note, I would like to urge the Committee on Trade and Development of the World Trade Organization and the member States of that organization to favourably consider the four-step proposal made by the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat in respect of small and vulnerable States, in particular as regards the need to adopt measures of special and differential treatment for such States.

Seychelles, in collaboration with the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development

Programme, hosted the first conference of small African island States, in which Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar also took part. The outcome of the conference was the Mahe Declaration and Programme of Action which, *inter alia*, reaffirm that the per capita income index is inadequate to measure the level of development and resilience of small island developing States.

Therefore, my delegation cannot over stress the importance it attaches to the early development of a better composite index for small island developing States. We welcome the progress made so far by the United Nations system, especially the conclusion of the group of experts that small island States as a group are more vulnerable than other groups of developing countries. We are of the view that the United Nations should undertake closer coordination with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, which have done significant work on the subject, in order to achieve wider international acceptance of the foundations on which the index should be built.

My delegation urges the international community to grant priority to this matter, in particular the financial institutions that use the gross national product per capita criterion alone for eligibility to concessional financing. This should help us move towards a more dynamic pace in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Magdalena Lizardo, Under-Secretary of State for Planning of the Dominican Republic.

Mrs. Lizardo (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the Dominican Republic, to take the opportunity offered by this very important special session of the General Assembly to welcome and congratulate the organizers, who were wise enough to convene this session to assess the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Since the holding of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, levels of awareness and commitment have increased in the Dominican Republic with regard to the implementation of policies that raise people's standards of living and ensure the sustainability of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

As part of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Dominican Republic has committed itself to implementing the Programme of Action adopted at the Barbados Conference. Governmental action began with the recognition that education and community participation are key elements in encouraging changes in the production and consumption processes. Those elements are central to ensuring the efficacy of public policies aimed at sustainable development.

The sum of the progress made by the Dominican Republic in putting into practice the Programme of Action can be seen in the evaluation of the measures taken in the areas of institutional legislation, protection and conservation and education. By signing and ratifying important international treaties, we have undertaken the commitment to comply with the regulations needed to protect the environment. In particular, since the Rio Summit we have ratified 11 international conventions and protocols, and others are currently under review for approval.

The drafting of a bill on the protection of the environment and natural resources is of singular importance. That bill will be submitted soon to the National Congress by the President of the Republic, Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna. This law would establish mechanisms and tools for the management of the environment in accordance with the principles that came out of the Rio Summit in 1992. It would also mandate the incorporation of the environmental factor throughout the entire system of economic planning.

The work carried out in the institutional area has been the subject of much of our effort and attention because we understand that fragmentation, overlapping and the lack of coordination make our efforts less efficient. In this connection, we have established the National Institute for Environmental Protection, which will be responsible for the implementation of our national system for assessing environmental impacts. We are also in the process of developing the institutional plan for the State Secretariat of the Environment, which will be the ministry in charge of managing the environment and natural resources in a unified and integrated manner.

These initiatives are a response to the priorities established by the National Dialogue, which was a process of discussion and consultation between the Government and civil society that took place in 1998 with the aim of identifying national priorities in diverse areas of

development, including the areas of environment and sustainability.

With regard to conservation, preservation, monitoring and recovery of the environment, we are taking action with the help of technical and financial cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral.

At present, only unleaded gasoline with octane levels of 95 and 89 and fuel with a sulphur content of 0.3 per cent are being used, and the importation of used cars is being penalized. We have put in place a programme to convert refrigerant industries and factories that produce materials that deplete the ozone layer. We are also developing reforestation and forestry management projects, as well as management and conservation projects for coastal resources.

Among these projects, we should highlight the Quisqueya Verde National Plan, which is being carried out in 41 reforestation areas throughout our territory. This plan has so far resulted in the planting and maintenance of 20 million plants. This initiative, through the integration of neighbouring communities into reforestation areas, is having a positive impact on employment and living conditions in those communities. It is also heightening awareness of the need to safeguard natural resources and helping to alleviate the global effects of climate change.

In the area of education, we would like to underscore that environmental issues have been incorporated into primary and intermediate curricula as well as in official educational texts.

Because the Dominican Republic recognizes that environmental preservation requires coordinated action at the multinational level, it has increased its presence in regional discussion and decision-making forums through its participation in the Association of Caribbean States and the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America. Likewise, we attach great significance to the work done by the Subcommittee on Natural Resources and Environment within the framework of the Haiti and the Dominican Republic's Joint Binational Commission, which is elaborating joint programmes for the protection of natural resources.

Despite the progress made in implementing the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, we remain deeply concerned about certain issues because of their potential

implications for the sustainability of natural resources and the protection of the environment in the Dominican Republic.

The consequences of climate change have affected us directly and resulted in considerable expense. For instance, Hurricane Georges' passage through the Dominican Republic resulted in direct and indirect costs equal to approximately 8.4 and 4 per cent, respectively, of our gross domestic product for 1998. In 1997, our agricultural sector suffered dramatically from the effects of the drought and from the change in rainfall patterns associated with El Niño. This has weakened our ability to produce foodstuffs domestically, negatively affected our productive infrastructure, decreased the capacity of our environmental services and damaged the economies of rural communities. The result has been increased poverty and the destabilization of the balance of payments and the economy in general.

There is evidence that the lower coastal areas are being affected by the rise in sea level. The Dominican Republic attaches great importance to international cooperation in the technical and financial fields in studying and monitoring this phenomenon and mitigating its adverse effects.

The Dominican Republic recognizes the vital importance of the Caribbean Sea to the sustainable development of the States that share its waters, and in particular of sustainable tourism. For that reason we support the proposal to adopt a draft resolution proclaiming the Caribbean Sea as a special zone in the context of sustainable development, with a view to ensuring its preservation, avoiding its contamination from land sources and prohibiting the transport of toxic nuclear waste, which could lead to ecological disasters that would be fatal to the peoples and environment of the Caribbean.

The Dominican Republic, which is experiencing the adverse effects of climate change, would like, as a non-emitter of the substances contributing to that change, to appeal to the principle of shared but differentiated responsibility. In this respect, it calls upon the international community to increase technical and financial cooperation in order to mitigate the negative effects of climate change on small island developing States, as humankind as a whole will benefit from the commitment by those States to implement policies that safeguard biodiversity and ensure the sustainable development of our peoples.

We also call on the developed countries to ratify and implement the Kyoto Protocol with a view to addressing the causes of global warming and allowing for the development of an environmental service market through which our countries could access financial resources that could contribute to our sustainable development.

The President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mark Isaac, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Grenada.

Mr. Isaac (Grenada): This twenty-second special session of the General Assembly is the culmination of several high-level meetings, conferences and commissions, beginning with the Earth Summit on environment and development, held in Rio in 1992, which formulated Agenda 21, the blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States.

The intervening meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development gave rise to the 1994 United Nations Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados, which elaborated the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and was the precursor of this special session. In Barbados, 111 Governments, comprising developed and developing countries, rich and poor, adopted a Programme of Action under which they agreed to work in partnership for sustainable development on the national, regional and international levels to ensure a better quality of life for the growing number of people struggling to cope in a complex global economy.

This special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States should be an opportunity for the partners to examine sincerely and critically where they have fallen short in the fulfilment of an endeavour freely undertaken several years ago.

It is the hope of my delegation that the twenty-second special session will finally tell us how much of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States has been fulfilled and what is necessary to accomplish the rest, bearing in mind that sustainable development is a partnership that carries shared responsibility.

Fourteen problem areas were identified in the Barbados Programme of Action that warrant attention over the next five years.

It is the considered judgment of the leaders, both in the developed and developing countries, that in this partnership arrangement there is a need to prioritize these problems into six areas of urgency. My own country, as its own priority, respects these six problem areas and is attempting to incorporate them into its national policy through certain actions, measures and strategies.

Tourism is a major source of foreign exchange and has contributed to the development of the country by stimulating the development of other sectors such as agriculture, arts and crafts, transportation, aquatic sports, infrastructure and so on. However, inherent in our national policy is the realization that if not properly managed, tourism could significantly degrade the environment on which it is so dependent. This unsustainable development of tourism would be comparable to killing the goose that lays the golden egg — the very antithesis of what we hope to accomplish.

Eco-tourism must be in harmony with the fragile environment and with the supply of arable land so as not to disturb the food chain, taking into consideration also water management and the carrying capacity of other infrastructures.

Freshwater management is also high on the list of our concerns, as it should be globally. This precious commodity is not inexhaustible and therefore requires prudent management for both industrial and non-industrial use.

The Achilles heel of the small island developing States is their small size and economy and their vulnerability to natural disasters — hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes, cyclones, floods and landslides. We can never know exactly when and where they will strike. However, we do know that almost all small island developing States in the Caribbean, some with more frequency than others, have experienced the destructive power of nature, which can be equally benevolent.

National and regional action policies and measures consist of disaster preparedness, enforcement of early-warning systems, building codes and public- and private-sector recovery plans. Environmental disasters occur to the region in the form of oil spills and waste disposal from

ocean-going vessels, as well as other man-made disasters, which are tackled on a regional level.

Grenada takes very seriously the protection of its coastal ecosystems and its coral reefs from pollution and overfishing, which is a major policy matter. Sustainable development in small island developing States depends in large measure on coastal and marine resources for subsistence and cash. The large number of people living in the coastal areas increases the competition for limited resources. The establishment of a 200-mile exclusive economic zone has further limited the effectiveness of management measures, resulting in the over-exploitation and pollution of natural resources. This pollution is beginning to attack our coral reefs, which are natural barriers to encroachment by salt water, and it is upsetting the balance on which the organisms depend.

Overfishing by ships flying foreign flags, which intrude upon our waters with impunity, is adding to the degradation of our marine ecosystem. Small island developing States should be able to commit themselves to signing and ratifying the United Nations Agreement for the International Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

Climate change and sea level rise could submerge low-lying countries, thereby adversely affecting the populations and the agricultural land and infrastructure concentrated in coastal zones. Such island nations require the help of their larger industrial partners to adapt to a phenomenon to which the island nations contributed little by way of greenhouse gas emissions.

The other area of concern to my country at this time is the need for assistance in the transfer of environmentally friendly technologies, which can be most helpful to the development of solar and renewable energy and thereby lessen the dependence on imported fuel.

At the core of the concept of sustainable development is the recognition of the centrality of the human person in economic, social and cultural sustainable development. That is why capacity-building and good governance are so important in this process.

Societies will be judged according to their treatment of their vulnerable groups, and civilization will be judged according to its treatment of vulnerable countries. In this connection, therefore, the matter of globalization and trade liberalization must be mentioned. Trade is key to the promotion of sustainable development generally, and

in particular to that of the small island developing States. Globalization and trade liberalization have brought conspicuous consumption to many developed countries, but to certain small island developing States in the Caribbean, especially those that export bananas, the experience has been one of misery. That is why we fail to understand the recent ruling of the dispute settlement mechanism of the World Trade Organization against the European Union (EU) in favour of the large transnational corporations of banana growers.

The EU has for many years been helping the small Caribbean islands to compete with the transnational corporations through a subsidizing arrangement so that the Caribbean small island developing States can sustain themselves in a fiercely competitive market. As we view the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, we raise our voices to say loudly and clearly from this lofty rostrum that the sustainability of small island developing States will be enhanced by clarity in the application of trade liberalization and not by the interplay of clarity and obscurity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Kilroy Genia, Minister for Attorney-General of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Genia (Papua New Guinea): It is an honour to be taking part in this special session of the General Assembly marking the fifth anniversary of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados.

As a member of the Alliance of Small Island States and the South Pacific Forum, Papua New Guinea is pleased that this session is renewing the international focus on the peculiarities of the development challenges that small island developing States will face in the next century. It is the last opportunity that we will have in this millennium to occupy centre stage and take a critical look at our concerns and needs.

In response to the commitments made at the Earth Summit in Rio, the Conference on small island developing States marked a historical moment. It recognized the special needs of small island nations. It laid a path to a fuller understanding of the unique challenges faced by our countries and affirmed a global response to assist small island developing States to achieve sustainable development.

During the preparatory meetings of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, we heard about the contributions of small island developing States to a pioneering global policy debate on many issues on sustainable development. A remarkable measure of our collective success is the integration of the values and principles of small island developing States in the conscience of the international community, the policy makers and the implementers on the ground.

Since Barbados, there has been a discernible improvement in the efforts of the international community to address our concerns not as an isolated event but as an integral part of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development worldwide. But we can and must do better. We must continue to strengthen cooperation towards implementation of the Programme of Action and related agreements. While we have seen a growing political conscience with regard to our concerns, we note that the struggle to be treated, as opposed merely to being recognized, as a special group of countries at the international level remains unfulfilled.

I say this because I believe that there is general recognition that, first, we are a group of countries with a low degree of resilience in recovering from natural disasters; and secondly, we are highly vulnerable to policies of globalization and trade liberalization. From a philosophical and, in some respects, political perspective, that recognition is positive. But in terms of funding the Barbados Programme of Action, it cannot be said that official development assistance has been increased because of our peculiarities.

My delegation recognizes that to a certain degree our partners in development require the fulfilment of certain conditionalities in order to increase official development assistance or concessional funding for projects. At times, the fulfilment of the conditionalities depends on the completion of the required paperwork for drawdowns to be effected. If such is the handicap, it can only provide evidence that we are indeed limited by a lack of appropriate manpower needs and skills necessary to prepare documentation to meet the required criteria. I can therefore only request that our international partners in development make provision for technical assistance in this area so as to remedy this handicap.

Papua New Guinea is an archipelagic State consisting of nearly 1,000 small islands and large internal waters. It has vast resources. It harbours one of the world's remaining tropical rainforests and is rich in

biodiversity. We are experiencing environmental problems similar to those of other small island developing States, including increasing pressure on our urban areas, a low internal market capacity and high transport and export costs. These constraints are compounded by a heavy reliance on imports, increased competition, illicit drug trafficking and the erosion of preferential access to markets.

Education and capacity-building are powerful tools, and we call upon the United Nations to increase its assistance through education and making better use of local organizations in small island developing States that are skilled in training and raising awareness.

We are proud that our policies for maintaining economic growth through resource management are geared towards popular participation in environmental protection, habitat and sustainability. We recognize that there is a need for cooperation among small island developing States in many fields. In our small way, Papua New Guinea will continue to extend technical cooperation to our regional partners in many areas, such as the management, conservation and sustainable development of fisheries, forestry and agriculture, and medical research.

As small island developing States are starting from a disadvantaged position — certainly not one of socioeconomic equality — the international community needs to fast-track the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It is much like putting a team of amateur footballers up against a professional team. The game will be lopsided unless the rules of the game are drafted to give the amateurs a few advantages. Alternatively, we must be given a lot more training possibilities; and, whenever necessary, development partners should send their coaches to raise the standard of our footballers before they can be expected to play the game on a level playing field. This may also involve a reduction in the number of players on the professional team so as to give us an advantage enabling us to compete on an equal footing. It is much like a trade concession aimed at reducing the odds against our producers.

My Government has taken measures to strengthen pollution control and environmental management and monitoring, including stringent conditions for the issuance of licences and permits for resource use and development. We are currently reviewing the effects of mining activities. We are pleased with the work done by international and regional organizations, such as those in the South Pacific,

on a vulnerability index. We pay tribute to Malta for its pioneering work on that index. In this connection, let me draw the attention of participants to the side-event that the delegation of Japan and my own delegation are organizing for tomorrow during the lunch hour. My delegation looks forward to seeing all participants there for a lively discussion on the vulnerability index.

We are pleased by the steps taken by the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, to strengthen ties between the United Nations and regional organizations of small island developing States. Our firm commitment has been manifested in initiatives such as our regional stand against the transportation, storage and dumping of nuclear and other toxic and hazardous waste.

We advocate closer cooperation in the new century to resolve ongoing problems relating to solid and liquid waste generated by ships. It is disconcerting that the long- and short-term costs of the resulting pollution, including oil spills in ports and bilging on the high seas, have to be borne by small island developing States. As the most vulnerable group because of our fragile ecological systems, our geographical locations and our proneness to natural disasters, we remain the world's radar for global climate change and sea-level rise. We are, as many non-governmental organizations have said, the "canary in the coal mine".

As the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea, The Right Honourable Sir Michael Somare, said here on Friday, 24 September, world scientists have unequivocally confirmed that human-induced activities are affecting the global climate. It is no surprise that we are experiencing more frequent hurricanes, storms, tornadoes, droughts and other natural disasters. At home we are still redressing the devastation of last year's tsunami, the effects of two volcanic eruptions in 1994 and the effects of the phenomena known as El Niño and La Niña. I take this opportunity to convey the deep appreciation of my people, my Government and my country to those countries that have given us support and assistance in these difficult times.

A concern for many of us is the need to address the issue of good governance in the affairs of the world's oceans and seas. I reiterate our earlier calls for a decision to be taken during the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly to establish a consultative process to improve the coordination and management of programmes related to the protection of our oceans and seas.

In closing, we reaffirm our support for the statements made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Samoa as Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States. A better deal for small island developing States and a strong declaration at this special session would be a fitting conclusion to this millennium.

The President: I give the floor next to Mr. Roberto Flores Bermúdez, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Honduras.

Mr. Flores Bermúdez (Honduras) (spoke in Spanish): The small island developing States, some 40 in number, have made enormous efforts to fulfil the commitments undertaken in 1994 in Barbados. Many of them have formulated and implemented national environmental-protection plans and have established sustainable-development agencies. Such projects are national and regional in scope, and include the participation of ministries, the private sector and civil society. Donor countries too have worked to meet their commitments, as reflected in the recent meeting between their representatives and the representatives of small island States. At that meeting, they all noted the need for improved and effective coordination at all levels, including in the private sector.

Yet a great deal remains to be done. Small island developing States face difficult challenges, while the financial resources they need are on the wane. Small islands are particularly vulnerable to external economic impact, such as that caused by changes in the prices of their exports or by financial crises in the regions with which they trade. These small countries are also extremely vulnerable to natural disasters such as hurricanes, cyclones, tidal waves and earthquakes, which unfortunately have become considerably more frequent in recent years.

All of this has a direct impact on the 40 small States we are discussing at this session, but it also affects the population of the entire world. The decline in development financing, and especially in official development assistance, is of concern to all of us, developed and developing alike. The key challenge to these small island States — sustainable economic development — must be a priority for the international community in the new millennium.

Small island States are the sites of much of the world's oceans and of world biodiversity; the well-being of their environment is therefore of particular importance. Hence, our comments are inspired not only by the

international solidarity we certainly feel towards these sister islands — and I recall that the territory of Honduras includes three islands in the Caribbean Sea — but also by something that must motivate all the Members of the Organization: the goal of ensuring well-being for all citizens of the world, who are affected by environmental degradation.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice President, took the Chair.

The Barbados Programme of Action addresses the important topics of climate change, natural disasters and human development, among many others. At this special session, the General Assembly is focusing on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. To ensure that our goals are attained, we need a monitoring system. As we said in Barbados, this will require a great deal of effort and financial resources. In reviewing the concept of the national interest, as the Secretary-General said on 20 September, we assign a new role to regionalism as a tool for identifying common interests.

We have every reason to congratulate our small-island brethren on their great effort to implement the Programme of Action. This special session should enable the international community to redouble its efforts and to ensure its full involvement in the Barbados Programme of Action, because implementation of the Programme will benefit all citizens of the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Chairman of the delegation of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (spoke in Arabic): Small island developing States represent, in general, the weakest developing economies, as a result of their environmental vulnerability and the fact that most of the time their trade depends on a limited number of agricultural products. Both of these factors expose them to environmental shocks beyond their control as well as to economic jolts resulting from the current mechanisms of the international trading system.

In one of the sad and strange coincidences of destiny, Barbados was recently struck by a devastating hurricane, just a few weeks before the special session of the General Assembly to review the Programme of Action that bears the name of that friendly country.

Small island developing States, just like all other developing countries, suffer from persistent marginalization in the new international economic order, which is governed by a tense relationship between two dynamic processes, namely, globalization and development. The *Trade and Development Report* issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on 20 September mentioned that the blind liberalization of the economies of developing countries threatens their growth at a time when imbalances in the international trading system persist, in the form of protectionist measures that are introduced through back doors under the pretext of protection of the environment and respect for human rights, and at a time when there is a constant drop in the prices of basic commodities, which are the backbone of the exports of developing countries, particularly small island developing States.

The principle of trade liberalization, which is the framework of international trade as embodied in various conventions resulting from the Uruguay Round, is necessarily associated with differential and more favourable treatment being granted to developing countries, as stipulated in various conventions. This is true even if preferential treatment has taken on a different form from its original conception in part IV of the provisions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which introduced the development dimension into the international trading system at that time, 20 years ago.

At the threshold of the new trade negotiation round, which is to be held this November, we call on the developed countries to be fully committed to all undertakings made in the Uruguay Round, particularly the special and preferential treatment to be granted to developing countries, including the small island countries. This will enable these countries to cope with and adapt to the negative impact of globalization and its risks.

This special session of the General Assembly is responsible for reminding the international community about the organic relationship between trade and sustainable development, which is best represented by the status of the economies of the vast majority of small island developing States. The persistent erosion of trade preferences, the application of restrictive measures against the products of developing countries in world markets and the decline in official development assistance make the application of sustainable patterns of production and consumption and protection of the environment something of a luxury. It is also a waste of the scarce natural resources in developing countries.

As far as small island developing States are concerned, this issue is a matter of survival. In this context, I must mention the limited production base that characterizes the economies of small island developing States, as well as their limited capacity to adapt to external variables.

The General Assembly today, in this special session, is exercising once again its right to design international economic policies and to direct the international community towards economic development, which is one of the objectives of the Charter. We are holding this special session to prove to the international community that the question of sustainable development cannot be confined to one narrow and limited framework, which limits the activities of development to the eradication of poverty only. The realization of economic growth and sustainable development, as repeatedly confirmed by the General Assembly, requires a change in the international environment as well as in its development and trade institutions, so that the developing countries, including small island developing States, will be able to rectify the historical imbalances of this century and their political and economic repercussions from which the developing countries are still suffering.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Gelson Fonseca, Chairman of the delegation of Brazil.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): Brazil, a country greatly concerned about environmental issues and which in 1992 hosted in Rio de Janeiro the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), takes a special interest in the implementation of the concept of sustainable development and therefore attaches the utmost importance to the follow-ups to UNCED, in this particular case the Barbados Programme of Action. Five years ago, the international community gathered to discuss the specific needs of small island developing States within the context of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration and the conventions emanating from UNCED. On that occasion, the peculiarities of small island States, their vulnerabilities, fragile ecosystems and susceptibility to natural disasters, were given due consideration in the formulation of a specific Programme of Action. The review and appraisal of its implementation is the objective of this special session.

The small island States have made progress in these five years since Barbados. Joint endeavours in the Pacific, in the Caribbean and in the Indian Ocean regions have shown that these island countries can and will

achieve sustainable development. Regional and subregional initiatives in the areas of sustainable tourism, fisheries policies, waste legislation and adaptation to climate change have been undertaken by those States and have proved to be a success.

Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. There is a need for the efforts of the small island States to be further supplemented by effective support from the international community. Access to appropriate technological innovation and the foundations for science and technology should be broadened. Capacity-building should receive much stronger support from overseas. Financial backing is also essential. My Government is confident that those problems will be properly addressed during this special session.

Brazil shares the struggle of small island developing States to achieve sustainable economic and social development. We, too, have a long way to go in the fight against social exclusion and to eradicate poverty. Yet their specificities make small island States unique, and therefore worthy of concerted international attention. The Brazilian Cooperation Agency, in the spirit of the Barbados Programme of Action and of technical cooperation among developing countries, has developed programmes geared to the needs of small island States, particularly in Latin America and in the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa.

These programmes cover many different areas, such as technical assistance in restructuring the Ministry of External Relations in Haiti, administrative reform in Cuba, urban development in the Dominican Republic, teacher training to improve the education system in Sao Tome and Principe and assistance in the area of water management in Cape Verde, to mention a few examples. The United Nations Development Programme is an important partner in a great number of these projects of technical cooperation among developing countries.

Small island developing States are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Therefore, we welcome specific initiatives that improve their capacity to adequately respond and adapt to such changes and enhance their research on climate prediction.

International cooperation is crucial not only among countries but also within the United Nations system and, in particular, within the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We also urge all countries to have the case of small island States in mind

during the fifth Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention in Bonn.

Achieving sustainable development is primarily the responsibility of the countries directly concerned. But we are also aware that the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action can be achieved only through strong, committed and concerted action. Therefore, the support of the developed countries, United Nations bodies, intergovernmental agencies and the major groups is of the utmost importance. Let us reaffirm our commitment to the spirit of Rio and of Barbados through our words and deeds during this session. It is our duty to make sure that the cooperation achieved among small island States in implementing the Programme of Action is echoed and supported on the broader international stage. Let us jointly undertake to adopt concrete and realistic measures to overcome all obstacles to the small island States' sustainable development. Let us think big to help our small neighbours.

The Acting President: I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Greece, His Excellency Mr. Elias Gounaris.

Mr. Gounaris (Greece): It is with particular pleasure that I address this special session following the statement delivered a while ago by Finland on behalf of the European Union, a statement to which Greece fully subscribes.

Five years have elapsed since the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action in Barbados and seven since the adoption of Agenda 21 in Rio, but the global cause and principles of sustainable development enunciated at those meetings fully retain their validity and relevance, not just for the small island developing States, but for the international community as a whole.

We welcome the holding of this special session, while warmly thanking the Secretariat for organizing it. It provides an important and timely opportunity — first, for the small island developing States, as it allows them as to voice their most pressing concerns, especially in view of the altered and changing circumstances since the adoption of the Programme of Action; and secondly, for the international community, which must take stock of the progress achieved so far and renew its firm commitment to more decisive action, especially in the priority areas identified by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session.

The Greeks have always been a seafaring nation, and my country's numerous islands — some 3,000 in all — especially the Aegean Archipelago, were, indeed, the cradle of Greek civilization. Having been confronted with problems similar to those of small island developing States, we fully acknowledge the specific ecological fragility and vulnerability of most of them not only as regards climate change, extreme weather phenomena, sea level rise and natural disasters, but also as a result of a number of serious economic and other constraints that hamper these countries' admirable efforts to achieve sustainable economic and social development.

It is therefore imperative that the international community redouble its efforts to accommodate the specific difficulties of small island developing States. This should be done in close partnership with individual Governments, the private sector and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), whose recent summit communiqué deserves particular attention. Cooperation with other regional organizations and institutions such as the Caribbean Community, the Caribbean Forum, the South Pacific Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission.

In this respect, the disquieting downward trend in financing for development, and the decline in official development assistance in particular, must be urgently reversed in order to support positive domestic and regional efforts by the small island developing States themselves. It is equally essential that the small island developing States be properly assisted not only in their efforts to combat and eradicate poverty, but also to build capacity and to fully reap the benefits of expanding globalization and trade liberalization, while forestalling the risks of marginalization. The development of a comprehensive vulnerability index to be used in conjunction with other established criteria is of obvious utility and should be pursued further. The same is also true for the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET), which is one tangible outcome of the Programme of Action.

Greece enjoys excellent relations with many small island developing States, including, in particular, Cyprus, which, when it has been in need, we have tried to help to the best of our abilities. In order to contribute to reversing the negative trend in official development assistance, my country, despite domestic economic restrictions, has decided to increase its official development assistance at an annual average rate of 25 per cent over the five-year period 1997-2001.

In the context of international cooperation for the implementation of the Programme of Action, Greece would be willing to share with the small island developing States its greater experience and expertise in areas of particular relevance to them, such as in promoting sustainable tourism in harmony with the preservation of cultural heritage; in managing coastal and marine resources; in dealing with the special needs and fragile ecosystems of small islands; and in dealing with the catastrophic effects of natural disasters, in particular of earthquakes, to which our region is especially prone.

Despite the impressive progress achieved in certain areas since the Barbados Conference, mainly thanks to the commendable efforts of the small island developing States themselves, a great deal still remains to be done. While reaffirming its unwavering commitment to the objectives of the Barbados Programme of Action, Greece expresses the hope that this important and auspicious special session will act as a catalyst for marshalling wide international participation and support for the implementation of the Programme of Action, as well as for the elaboration of an effective common strategy to address the sustainable development of small island developing States.

The Acting President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Juan Carlos Vignaud, Chairman of the delegation of Argentina.

Mr. Vignaud (Argentina) (spoke in Spanish): I salute the leader of the Namibian movement for democracy and freedom, who is serving as President of this special session, and the Ambassador of Grenada, who as a Vice-President is currently chairing the meeting.

I also welcome the participation of the Republic of Kirabati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

I also wish to thank the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, Mr. John Ashe, for his outstanding work in guiding our consultations.

Both Argentina and I myself, as one of two candidates for the director-generalship of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), attach great importance to this session. Those who have spoken before me have already had the opportunity to refer to the contents of the Barbados Programme of Action and to the considerable efforts of the small island

developing States to achieve the objectives set out therein. They have also noted the difficulties they have had to address. If I discuss these things any further I may bore members of the General Assembly through excessive repetition. I will therefore improvise a few words in order to touch upon two points that I feel to be essential to our discussion.

We have before us a set of proposals; what we do not know is when or how they are to be implemented. These are the two variables to which I wish briefly to refer.

First, I believe that we must agree to define precisely the timetable by which to develop the strategies that will enable us to achieve the objectives of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Plan of Action recently adopted by FAO. This discussion is potentially endless and I can imagine it dragging out at length. I believe, however, that the sense of urgency felt by the small island developing States requires immediate solutions. I feel that FAO can play an important role as a catalyst of international efforts to help the small island developing States.

It seems to me that one of the first measures to be adopted would be an analysis of priorities. We cannot work on the basis of a shopping list in which everyone receives everything. Rather, there should be a short list of priorities that will enable us to focus exclusively on those activities which will have the earliest impact. We also believe that we should focus on geographical priorities and on the most vulnerable sites.

In the context of the question of how to implement the proposals, it might also be a good idea for us, having precisely defined the short list of priorities, to attempt to convene a donor conference to which regional organizations, countries and non-governmental organizations would be invited, thereby allowing us to enjoy sufficient funds to implement these priority projects. I also feel that, by means of these projects, technological self-sufficiency can be promoted. To that end, we must call on the assistance of national institutions. In this regard, I would cite the University of the West Indies, the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and many other institutions that are in a position to complement the efforts of FAO and national agencies.

In conclusion, I welcome the draft declaration of the Caribbean Sea as a special zone in the context of sustainable development. We deem this measure,

acknowledging the special characteristics of the Caribbean, to be very important and necessary.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Chairman of the delegation of Croatia.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The implementation of the negotiated outcomes in the broad subject areas of sustainable development, from Rio onwards, is the key to promoting the global agenda of leaving a healthy planet Earth for future generations to enjoy.

Croatia has followed with great interest the implementation and development of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States since its adoption in 1994. As many representatives are aware, Croatia is both a Central European and a Mediterranean country. As such, it has a lengthy coastline and more than 1,000 islands. In this regard, Croatia has experienced some of the challenges with which small island developing States are confronted, particularly in the fields of communications, infrastructure development, sustainable tourism and human resources. Croatia is ready to share its experiences and policy responses developed through the implementation of its national island sustainable development programme with small island developing States.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, was an important crossroads in the growth of awareness of the particular points of vulnerability on our planet. What was evident was that some parts of the world are more vulnerable than others to the effects of nature and man. Amongst the most vulnerable are the small island developing States. At the same time, they also represent among the most pristine and idyllic, but increasingly at risk environments, that the world has to offer for the third millennium.

Thus, the world's small island developing States are on the front lines of the global struggle to protect the environment and pursue sustainable development. It is not wrong to note that the actions of States, no matter what their size — but most particularly the industrialized and developed ones — affect all others. For example, the greenhouse gases released from the territories of States contribute to the damage to the ozone layer, which in turn has a profound effect upon small island States.

There are, of course, no easy answers. These must involve both an internal response within the small island States themselves, as well as an appropriate response by and the support of the international community. By all accounts, the national responses of small island developing States have been significant and appropriate. Insofar as the United Nations system is concerned, the structure exists for supporting and monitoring implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

What, then, should be done? Clearly, there are some priority areas requiring attention. First, a simple reaffirmation of the need for financing for the proper implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action will not be enough. Whilst the States themselves have taken steps to implement the Programme of Action, the international donor community has not matched this with the fulfilment of its own obligations. Unfortunately, the present situation is symptomatic of the global decline in official development assistance. Croatia is of the view that foreign direct investment cannot be adequate replacement for official development assistance.

Secondly, the multilateral trading system no doubt favours large, globally integrated countries with good communications and diversified exports. The small island developing States, as well as some other countries, do not fit into this broad definition. This is a situation that will not improve without partnership relations between States that will harmonize trade policy as well as appropriate action on the part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Thirdly, the legislative basis for the establishment of a vulnerability index has been in existence since 1994. Such an index, containing more appropriate indicators for measuring the true social and economic situation in small island developing States, should be promptly set up.

Fourthly, there must be a transfer of technology, particularly related to desalinization, freshwater and waste treatment. Similarly, the promotion of research and development in environmentally sound technology, which is in the clear interest of all States, should be encouraged through specific policy measures. Such measures should take account of the need to contribute to capacity-building in small island developing States and should encourage the involvement of the private sector and public/private partnerships.

The final and overarching point is international cooperation and the sense of partnership between donors and the small island States. Global awareness of the issues facing small island developing States has been focused by the efforts of such regional groupings as the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission and the Alliance of Small Island States, which we commend for their work in the multilateral arena.

Finally, Croatia believes that the establishment of a consultative mechanism on oceans and seas is an important step, and supports the efforts of those States which continue to work in that direction. The global importance of oceans and seas clearly points to the need for international cooperation and coordination with oversight from the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Observer of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): We welcome the holding of this twenty-second special session of the General Assembly to review and assess the implementation of the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It is a pleasure for us to take part in the work of the special session.

The small island developing States undoubtedly constitute a very important part of the international community and the United Nations. This category of the world's countries certainly faces additional difficulties, similar to those faced by developing countries in general, in view of its geographic, climatic, environmental and economic conditions.

The Palestinian people, also a small nation, are still struggling to create a State and a national economy. We understand very well the difficult conditions experienced by other small nations and States. We fully support the claims and legitimate aspirations of the small island developing States to achieve and ensure a reasonable degree of material support and security with the sustained help of the international community, and through this special session. We also hope that this special session will give fresh and substantial impetus to the process of confronting the specific problems set out in the Programme of Action for small island developing States, in particular in the six priority areas singled out therein.

In this regard, I would like to pay tribute to the very substantial efforts made so far by the small island

developing States. We welcome the alliance among these States. We pay tribute to their continuing efforts and their united approach in their efforts to fulfil their interests and aspirations.

We are convinced that this special session will adopt a political declaration, the drafting of which is almost complete. In this connection, we would like to express thanks to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.